

BACK TO BASICS

Looking for the perfect junior rifle, Gareth Woolven-Brown & Son study the Weihrauch HW30 and HW99

With my eldest offspring rapidly reaching the stage where he wants to start shooting with me, and with an adage in mind taught by my late grandfather (a veteran of the Durham Light Infantry and the WWI Mesopotamia campaign), 'If you can learn to shoot a recoiling air rifle well on open sights, you can learn to shoot almost anything', I decided to pre-plan my eldest's first foray, and go shopping for suitable shooting hardware, well in advance of the day that it would actually be needed.

I am 6ft 5", and my genetic make-up has been passed down to my kids, so although the Weihrauch HW25 is truly spectacular bit of kit, it appeared to be too short. It was my first thought, but the practicality of the height problem meant that in this instance, I would have to pass it by.

With this in mind then, I elected to look further afield, and to my delight, discovered the 1020mm (3' 4") long Weihrauch HW30 II which was perfect for the job in hand (or would be by the time spring came and my eldest had grown an extra inch), so an example of the same was duly bought from The Airgun Centre, in Rayleigh, Essex. I chose .22 calibre because the recoil of a .22 springer is far more manageable for a youngster than that of a .177 of the same power. I



TOP TIP

Rifle fit is important and a novice shooter's technique can be ruined by using a badly-fitting gun

By keeping the range short, I ensured that Bradley would have fun.

considered it job-done, because it has plenty of oomph, and can quite easily be capable of power out-put up to 9ft.lbs.

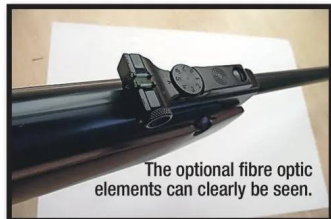
The HW30 II that I bought and as pictured here, came with a set of

highly impressive day-glo fibre-optic open sights fitted. These are an HW optional extra available for all open-sight Weihrauch models, and for me, the extra money was well spent. I was determined that open-sight

shooting should be mastered by my child, first, before going to a scope, so as to follow my late grandfather's mandate, and these fibre-optic sights enhance the open-sight shooting experience most admirably. ▶



The fore sight has a fibre optic insert too.



The optional fibre optic elements can clearly be seen.

The HW30 is a plain-looking gun that performs well.

ON TEST: JUNIOR WEIHRACHS



CHOICE RIFLE

My choice of rifle was further endorsed by the fact that the HW30 II weighs in at 2.5kg (5.5lb), has a barrel length of 420mm (16.5"), and a good balance, all of which make it a most manageable air rifle for the younger shooter. The HW30 II also represented a rifle that my child could potentially use right through to adulthood.

Further, it comes fitted with the most acceptable Weihrauch Perfect trigger unit (Perfect being it's name) and a trigger safety catch, I knew I'd bought right, and so after a bit of a play (a father's prerogative -- read bigkiditus), I oiled it up and put it

away in readiness for that long awaited day.

While waiting for that day however, I learned of a friend, of a friend, whose teenage son, Bradley, wanted to start shooting. So knowing the HW30 II was prep'd and ready to go, I offered both my, and the HW30 II's services. This offer was duly accepted, and so I met with young Bradley and his dad, on the range alongside the competition lanes, at Springfield Air Rifle Club (S.A.R.C.), near Ongar, in Essex.

After the initial meeting and greeting, the obligatory drinking of tea, and following a most stringent safety briefing, I started with the

preliminaries. First up, I wanted to check Bradley's compatibility to the HW30 II, and so I had him hold it in a shooting stance while I counted to fifty. This not only checks that the shooter is physically able to hold the rifle (which in turn signals that accuracy can in theory be attained), but it also ensures that the rifle can be handled safely. Bradley was able to hold the rifle steady(ish) for the full count.

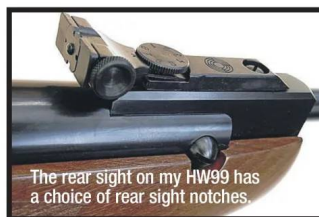
This test duly passed, the next step was to teach Bradley the correct hold. Here we had a minor problem, because the rifle was coming up a little large for him, so I commandeered a shooting bench

and bean bag, and continued from there. With Bradley seated, he could shoot problem free via a modified hold and shooting position (rifle slightly higher on the shoulder than it would normally be). This adapted stance would not be long-lasting however, as I pointed out to both Bradley and his dad, saying that a smaller rifle would be a false economy if they were to buy one, because within a growth-spurt or two, Bradley would find that the HW30 II would fit him perfectly.

With the open sights pre-set by me to a zero of ten metres, the next stage was to get him shooting at a set of knock-down targets and assorted tin



Scoped up, the HW99 looks every bit a grown-up rifle.



The rear sight on my HW99 has a choice of rear sight notches.



A simple squared foresight element was my choice on the 99.

cans that had been set out by me at said distance. I was keen to get Bradley shooting as soon as possible, to keep the momentum of interest going. I do this with all those I teach, because the sooner a student can start shooting, the sooner they can start having supervised fun, which in turn, means they may take up the sport.

I further endorsed the fun-factor attributed to learning, by explaining that a miss doesn't matter, and that although the learning curve of levelling the front and rear sights to target can be long, it can still be enjoyed, hence the inclusion of the tin cans on the range, as nowt is more satisfying than plinking a baked bean tin, and watching it hop up and down.

After half an hour, I added the discipline and methodology of hold over and under into the mix, and introduced five and 15-metre targets, too. This can be one of the hardest areas of target acquisition to master. It can seem quite an alien concept at first, but once mastered, this skill, and it is a skill, will stay with a shooter throughout their shooting life, and aid most admirably with learning to use a scope at a later date.

Bradley took to this additional training with remarkable ease, and grasped the concept of hold over, and under, in no time at all. Play time is fun time, however, and so for the final 15 minutes of Bradley's hour-long lesson, I stood back and let him plink freely, although I remained on hand just in case.

Once Bradley's range-time and lesson were up, I wanted to gauge how he had enjoyed it. So what did Bradley think? Well, to cut a long story short, following his time at Springfield Air Rifle Club, Bradley has become the proud owner of an HW30 II in .22. That says it all really. This got me to thinking though. What would be a natural springer break-barrel step up for a growing shooter to progress to following on from an HW30 II, and what would be a good springer break-barrel for me, as an adult, to use alongside my eldest and his HW30 II?

With these two questions in mind, I went straight to the Weihrauch website for a cyber wander. Guess what I found?

THE WEIHRAUCH HW99S

I have been an owner, shooter, and advocate of Weihrauch air rifles since



Sexy laser-cut chequering brings the HW99 right up to date.

my first encounter with an example of the now legendary HW35 back in the mid-1970s, and have owned no less than 18 Weihrauch air rifles since. Springer break-barrel wise I am still a fan of the HW35, and an equally big a fan of the HW80/80K and the HW95K. Although all of these are superb rifles, I cannot see any of them constituting the next natural step-up for an aspiring young shooter as a natural follow-on from an HW30 II.

The HW35 is far too long for an adolescent shooter; the HW80/80K is too heavy for someone not yet fully grown, and the HW95K is a scope-only rifle, so would not be a true next step up/bigger version of the HW30 II.

"BRADLEY TOOK TO THIS ADDITIONAL TRAINING WITH REMARKABLE EASE"

The cyber cakewalk paid dividends: enter the new style HW99S, now fitted with the Rekord trigger unit, the best trigger unit Weihrauch make, and arguably one of the best trigger units on the market. Fully lusted up that this was what I wanted, off I trotted back to those good people at The Airgun Centre, in Rayleigh, Essex, for a play with an HW99S to see how it looked and felt in my hands, and to assess its suitability for the job.

The first thing I noticed when I came face to face with the HW99S, was the new-style chequering and name embossing by Weihrauch to the woodwork. Although a break from tradition for Weihrauch, I liked this a lot, and along with the newly-designed ambidextrous stock, it leap-frogged way beyond the standing of the original HW99, and as such, allowed the HW99S to become a serious contender.

Sporting a 15mm diameter barrel as on the HW35/35K, rather than the 16mm diameter barrel as used for the HW95K and HW80/80K, coupled with the same, central under-side stock to action, screw mounting system as on the HW35/35K, and HW30 II, the HW99S can be seen to be part of this branch of the Weihrauch family, although sharing compression chamber dimensions with the HW95K, it can sit equally well on that side of the HW family, too.

Weighing in at a modest 3.2kg (7lb) with an overall length of 1050mm (3' 5 1/2"), and a barrel length of 410mm (16"), the HW99S felt very pointable in my hands, so

before long, my decision was made, and money was spent. Although most of my rifles are in .177, again, I elected to go for an example in .22, to offer the continuity I was after as a natural step-up from the HW30 II. Besides, I like having a few of my arms in .22, if nothing else, they make for great winter guns, because when fingers become cold, frozen and numb, as they often can after a couple of hours traipsing around the farm on bitter winters days, the extra size of the .22 pellet over that of the .177 makes for much easier pellet picking and loading.

When purchasing my HW99S, unlike the HW30 II which went before, I didn't up-grade the open sights to the fibre optic type, because I knew this rifle would be mostly shot scoped-up with an AGS 3-9x40 mil-dot scope that I'd bought the month before. I still wanted the option to return to shooting this rifle on open



sights when the fancy took me, though, hence the importance of going for the HW99S over the slightly more expensive scope-only HW95K.

OPEN SIGHTS

The open sights that come with the HW99S are not the same as the ones that come as standard with the open sight variant of the HW35 and HW80. The ones on the HW99S are a little more rudimentary, and don't feature the interchangeable front sight element options of the other two. The standard open sights that do come with the HW99S are quite adequate, however, as the Bisley target pictured can testify. It shows a seven group at 20 metres that I shot – the one high, and one low flyer probably owe more to pilot error than any front sight deficiency. That all said, though, if I were only to ever shoot this HW99S with open sights, a set of the optional extra, after-market HW fibre-optic open sights would've definitely been a part of the purchase package.

I found my HW99S took longer to run-in over other Weihrauch spring-powered air rifles I've owned though. It took nearer four tins of H&Ns to settle down rather than the usual two, but it is now consistently running between 11.ft. lb and 11.2ft.lb, and it has next to none of the spring 'twang' that some of my Weihrauchs have had in the past. All in all then, the HW99S is a great full-sized, lighter-weight, spring-powered, break-barrel air rifle, and in my opinion, represents a good middle-priced, middle-ground air rifle for those who want a quality piece of good-looking kit. Right then, that's it. Happy hunting everyone, and speak with you again in a month or three after my long-term shooting test of a ... Ahhh, now that would be telling, wouldn't it? ■